
[Kenya: Canadian titanium mining challenged by new government](#)

Tiomin Kenya Limited, a subsidiary of Tiomin Resources Inc. of Canada, began exploring the mineral sands of Kenyan coast in 1995 in search of titanium. (see WRM Bulletin N° 38.). Stretching for 402 kilometers, the area is a unique tropical culture with ancient Arabic architecture, coral reefs, and fragile ecosystems.

Further research proved there were five titanium rich sites with 650 million tons at Mambui and 1.2 billion tons at Sokoke. There were unknown quantities at Sabaki, Mombasa, and Kwale. The deposits were of such quantity that could be mined for 20 years at a rate of 480,000 tonnes per annum. They contain rutile, ilmenite, and zircon, the first two being sources of titanium dioxide (primarily used in the production of pigments for paints, plastics and paper), while zircon is used in the fabrication of ceramic and enamel glazing, refractories and electronic equipment.

In 2002, the previous Kanu Government granted an environmental permit to Tiomin allowing negotiations for a monumental titanium strip mining lease to begin in the Kwale district, near the country's southeast coast. The decision furthered the proposed US\$120-million project, which would displace nearly 5,000 people from their homes and fields, covering approximately 2,400 hectares of land.

Opposition to the mining project has been rife among the local people, with concerns about the desecration of ancestral graves and the fate of their sacred forests, in addition to losing their homes, health, and livelihood. Kenyan scientists were also concerned about sulphur dioxide emissions, the health risk of the release of radioactive uranium and thorium in the titanium laden Kwale sands --now in their thermodynamic stable state--, about the threats to the marine life and to the coral reefs posed by the mining facility.

Now, the project is being challenged by the new National Rainbow Coalition government, which has announced that it is planning to conduct a public forum to discuss whether Tiomin Resources Inc. should be licensed to start mining the mineral in Kenya. The assistant environment minister and renowned environmentalist Professor Wangari Maathai, said that "the government is still hesitant" to license the company "as there are environmental concerns which have not been sorted out." Her ministry announced that an independent team will carry another environmental impact assessment "to assess the dangers the mining might pose to the ecosystem", since a previous environmental assessment report presented by the mining firm to the previous government had received much criticism with stakeholders dismissing it as shoddy.

A second study led by Dr. Wamicha, of Kenyatta University, warning about the level of radioactivity and presence of sulfur during the mining, had been scorned by Tiomin. The firm's vice president, Mathew Edler, then said, "Kenya lacks environmental consultants who have the necessary experience to manage the EIA [environmental impact assessment] for the Kwale project. Placing the EIA title on its cover does not make it credible," triggering an uproar from the same people now in government.

Corporations such as this are certainly very good at producing all the necessary EIAs. They can easily hire all the necessary consultants to put a stamp of approval on any of their projects. They do have the money. But they lack something far more important: the social and environmental credentials that are present in some of the present Kenyan government officials. Things appear to have changed and the mining project seems to be further away now than it was before.

Article based on information from: "Titanium Mine Threatens Communities in Kenya", Volume 4, Number 19, November 23, 1999, http://www.moles.org/ProjectUnderground/drillbits/4_19/4.html ; "Hotspots", Volume 7, Number 6, July 31, 2002, Drillbits & Tailings, http://www.moles.org/ProjectUnderground/drillbits/7_06/hotspots.html ; "Titanium Mine License Eludes Canadian Firm in Kenya", Jennifer Wanjiru, Environment News Service (ENS), "Cancel Titanium Project, Kibaki Gov't Urged", The East African Standard (Nairobi), January 2, 2003, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200301020625.html>